

2025 Stretch and Opt-In Specialized Building Codes Frequently Asked Questions

1. Does the Opt-In Specialized Code apply to existing structures?

No. Improvements to existing structures, depending on size, are regulated by Shutesbury's current building code.

2. Will the Opt-In Specialized Code discourage the creation of affordable housing?

No. Incentives will continue to encourage affordable housing while the Opt-In Specialized Code delivers economic benefits for residents.

3. Is it possible to install a gas cooktop in new construction under the Opt-In Specialized Code?

Yes. This is permitted under the Mixed Fuel pathway.

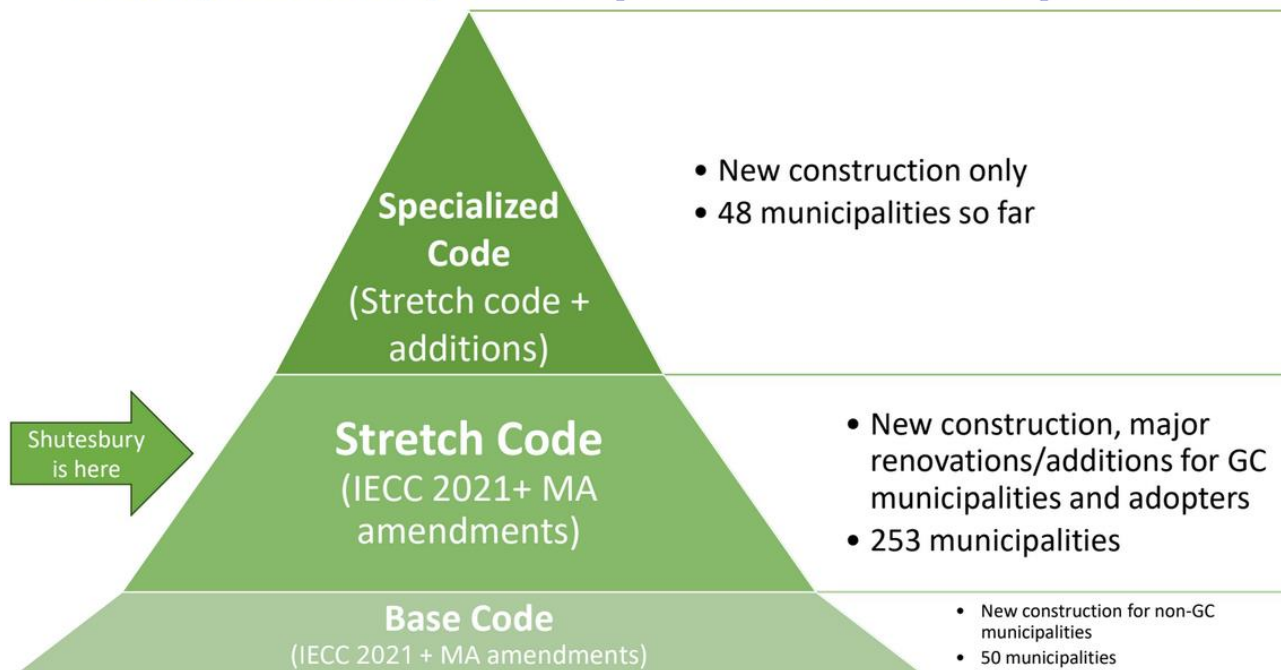
4. Why adopt the Opt-In Specialized Code?

The #1 reason is that the Opt-In Specialized Code requires pre-wiring, avoiding costly retrofits down the road.

5. Why does the Opt-In Specialized Code permit fossil fuels?

The Opt-In Specialized Code preserves market choice at a time when utility pricing is volatile.

Base, Stretch, and Specialized – 3 Options



6. What are the building energy code options for municipalities in Massachusetts?

Building codes govern energy efficiency requirements in new construction and major renovations, which help save money on energy costs and also reduce greenhouse gas emissions. Massachusetts municipalities can follow one of three building codes. These codes are the Base Code, the Stretch Code, and the Specialized Code. The minimum or 'base' energy code is the least stringent and a recent version of the International Energy Conservation Code. Shutesbury adopted the Stretch Code at a Town Meeting in 2010.

7. What is the Stretch Code?

The Stretch Code is published and maintained by the Department of Energy Resources. Based on our status as a Green Community, Shutesbury is automatically subject to Stretch Code updates, the most recent of which took effect on February 14, 2025. The Stretch Code increases the energy efficiency requirements for new residential and commercial buildings, as well as large additions (adding an area $\geq 1,000$ -sf or doubling the size of a conditioned floor area). Using tax credits and Mass Save incentives, it can be less expensive to build and maintain Stretch code homes heated and cooled with heat pumps than those heated with natural gas built under the Base Code.

8. What is the Specialized Code?

The Specialized Code would help achieve MA greenhouse gas emission limits and ensure new construction is consistent with the net-zero Massachusetts economy projected for 2050. The Specialized Code is effective at reducing greenhouse gas emissions through a combination of reduced energy use and efficient electrification. Use of fossil fuels such as gas, propane, or biomass is permitted but comes with additional requirements for on-site solar generation and pre-wiring for future electrification of any fossil-fuel-using equipment.

9. Does the Specialized Code apply to me?

The Specialized Code applies only to new residential and new commercial construction.

10. How is the Specialized Code different from the Stretch Code?

The Specialized Code has accelerated adoption of more efficient Home Energy Rating System thresholds. New homes that require burning things inside must include wiring for future electrification. Solar is required for any new construction using fossil fuels for heating. It also requires new homes over 4,000 sq ft to follow the all-electric or zero-energy pathway.

11. How would a town or city adopt the Specialized Code?

At this Town Meeting, we are deciding by a vote whether to opt in to the Specialized Code.

12. Do home builders have to cut down trees to meet the onsite solar requirements?

There are exceptions to the onsite solar requirements if the building site is shaded by trees.

13. How are Stretch and Specialized Codes implemented and enforced?

Implementation and enforcement of the code is similar to existing code, where the developer is responsible for submitting documentation of compliance to the building inspector for review, and the building inspector conducts a site review.

14. Where can I learn more about the Stretch and Specialized Codes?

<https://www.mass.gov/info-details/building-energy-code>